ORAL HISTORY OF THE TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY

INTERVIEWS WITH

JOHN C. McAMIS

BY - CHARLES W. CRAWFORD

TRANSCRIBER - BRENDA MEIER

ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE

MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY

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MARCH 11, 1970

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PLACE Knoxville, Tenn.

DATE March 16, 1970

J C McAmis
(Interviewee) John C. McAmis

(For the Mississippi Valley Archives of the John Willard Brister Library of Memphis State University)

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THIS IS THE ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE OF MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY. THIS PROJECT IS "AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY." THE INTERVIEW IS WITH MR. JOHN C. McAMIS AND IS INTERVIEW # I. THE DATE IS MARCH 11, 1970, AND THE PLACE IS KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE. THE INTERVIEW IS BY DR. CHARLES W. CRAWFORD, DIRECTOR OF MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE AND IS TRANSCRIBED BY MRS. BRENDA MEIER.

DR. CRAWFORD: Mr. McAmis, I suggest we start by getting a summary of your background; that is, where and when you were born, your education, and what you did before joining TVA.

MR. McAMIS: Well, I was born at Greeneville, Tennessee, July 1, 1890. That is eighty years ago last July. I was raised on a small farm near Greeneville, and also graduated from Tusculum College. Then I came to the University of Tennessee in 1910 and graduated in 1912.

My reason for going to the university to take a course in agriculture was that I observed the graduate connected with the operation of a small farm by my father and his five boys and one girl. And I thought that there must be some better way for a small farmer in East Tennessee country. . .

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you decide to study agriculture for that reason?

MR. McAMIS: Yeah, that was what it was all about.

DR. CRAWFORD: What kind of agricultural school did the University of Tennessee have then?

MR. McAMIS: Well, I think it was considered one of the good agricultural schools of the South. As I recall it was a small school at that time as indicated by the fact that the college in which I graduated was as I recall about thirteen. The student body was some three or four or five hundred, I'd say.

DR. CRAWFORD: Very different from today.

MR. McAMIS: Yes. (Laughter)

DR. CRAWFORD: What subjects did you study in particular? What professors influenced you most?

MR. McAMIS: I majored in agronomy, although the subject that interested me most after I got to the university was genetics because it gave me an explanation of things that I had observed on the farm. I think that is enough background. Do you?

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes. When did you graduate from the University of Tennessee and what did you do after that?

MR. McAMIS: I graduated in the summer of 1912 and the first job I had was teaching agriculture in the Teacher's Institute at Cleveland, Tennessee. The next one was with the State Department of Agriculture at Tennessee in which there was an agriculture train that ran throughout the state and I was teaching agriculture on the train.

DR. CRAWFORD: Before we go to the next one, what was this agricultural train? Was that sponsored by the state?

MR. McAMIS: By the State Department of Agriculture. Colonel Peck was the Commissioner of Agriculture at that time.

DR. CRAWFORD: How did you operate? Did you tour the state Did you stop long at each location?

MR. McAMIS: Yes, yes. We stopped for a day at each location.

DR. CARWFORD: Did you pick county seats throughout the state?

MR. McAMIS: Mostly county seats.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you work in all three grand divisions?

MR. McAMIS: Oh yes, all over the state.

DR. CRAWFORD: What subjects were you teaching and who were you teaching then?

MR. McAMIS: I was teaching agronomy at that time. What was that next question, Charles?

DR. CRAWFORD: What sort of people were you teaching?

MR. McAMIS: Farmers.

DR. CRAWFORD: Local farmers who would come for the session.

MR. McAMIS: That's right. They had some exhibits of

different kinds on the train.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you enjoy that kind of work and feel that you were helping them?

MR. McAMIS: Well, I was so inexperienced I didn't pay that any mind. I was just doing the best I could. I didn't know the state too well at that time. I hadn't been over it too much, but I felt I got a lot out of it by talking to farmers and observing conditions in various parts of the state.

DR. CRAWFORD: Sometimes I think you learn more by teaching than the people you are supposed to teach.

MR. McAMIS: That's right. That is exactly right.

DR. CRAWFORD: About what year was that experience?

MR. McAMIS: Well, that was in the summer and fall of 1912.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you find much difference in farming conditions from one grand division to the other? Did you have to change your teaching methods?

MR. McAMIS: Well, I tried to but I didn't know enough about it to change them very much. Although the Commissioner of Agriculture seemed to be satisfied with what I was doing, I wasn't very well satisfied. Then in the late fall of 1912 I was employed by the County Board of Education at Jackson to teach agriculture in the high schools. I went from one rural high school to another.

I did that all during the winter of 1912 and '13. In the spring of '13 I had a telephone call from Mr. George Dant, the miller at Union City. He wanted me to come up to talk to him about some problems that they had. So I did, and he told me that he and a group of farmers had made up a fund for the employment of what they called then an agricultural advisor. This, of course, was before the Smith Lever Act was passed and the agricultural extension work was begun.

DR. CRAWFORD: But you were doing about the same work, weren't you?

MR. McAMIS: Well, not exactly. The Smith Lever Act called for demonstration work. I was doing a little different thing. I was trying to find out some of their problems. One of their problems was that their red clover was failing, and another the wheat yields were going down, consequently, the interest of the miller in this situation.

Well, I told Mr. Dant that I knew very little about conditions up there. All I knew was methods of finding out the answers to some of these problems. I had worked the summer of 1911 on the university farm helping to weigh and report and record the results of some research on the university farm, and that I had learned something about the methods of solving problems in agriculture. So I told Mr. Dant that that's all I could do. I had no knowledge of these conditions in Obion County.

This was on Saturday. He said, "Could you come back on Monday and meet my Board of Directors?", who were farmers. And I said, "Yes, I can

come back Monday if you will pay my way up. I paid it this time, and I want you to pay for it the next itme." Of course, he agreed.

Well, I met this group of farmers and talked to them about ten or fifteen minutes, telling them that I didn't know anything about their problems and that the experiment station at Jackson was under different agricultural conditions and soil conditions, and it had been organized in 1909, and the results there were not conclusive and therefore, we had no information. All I would offer was a method of finding out what the solutions to the problems were.

And they said, "Would you step out of the room for a few minutes?" And I said, "Why, yes I will." So in about ten minutes they called me back and said, "We're going to offer you $1800 a year, $150 a month, furnish you a horse and buggy at the livery stable, and when you are out in the county, we will pay any expenses if you will submit a voucher for these expenses. How about it?"

Well, I said, "I'm just making $100 a month now at Jackson. In the first place, I have to get released from my understanding with the Board of Education before I could accept the employment here, and I suppose I could get used to $50 more than I'm getting now. That's more than I thought I would ever make, and so far as that horse and buggy is concerned, I have borrowed one from farmers up in Jackson and fed him myself and taken care of him, but I suppose I could get used to having all this at the livery stable. But there's one point that I want to be awfully clear with you gentlemen about, and that is who is going to interpret these results. Now

I am going to show you how to get them, but it's going to be up to you to apply these results to your own conditions because I just don't know them. I have to have some help in putting out test areas and I would have to have some land and some equipment to do it with and if you will do that and be responsible for it then I'll turn in the results to the Board and then you will be responsible for the interpretation and the application. "Well," they said, "would you step out of the room." (Laughter) And I said, "Of course". Well, they kept me out for nearly an hour discussing this thing. They called me back and they said, "Well, now from what you say it's a little bit unusual, but we've decided we are going to take it". So I got released from my job at the Jackson Board of Education and went up there in April, 1913. I don't care to go any further into that except to say that I could not get any response whatsoever on any crop from the use of phosphate. I could get it from nitrogen and I could get it from potash and lime, but none whatsoever from phosphate. It is my understanding since that time that they are getting good response from use of phosphates on those black lands around Union City. You are familiar with the situation up there.

And the only conclusion that I can come to is that those soils are not very well supplied with phosphate, but what is there is highly available. And the only conclusion I can come to is that they had taken out the phosphate on those level lands and shipped it out in bone of animals.

Well, the university was conducting a short course at Dresden, Tennessee. Dr. Morgan and Dr. Kepler and members of the faculty of the univer-

sity came in and did some teaching. They asked me to come over from Union City and teach them agriculture in what they called a short course at that time. So I did for a week, I guess. Then the Smith Lever Act was passed in 1914, and Dr. Morgan asked me to come back. Well. Kepler was Director of the Agricultural Extension Service. They asked me to come back to the university as a Specialist in Agronomy. Well, I said, "I will if you will give me time to go to the University of Missouri and take some advanced work, which I did in the summer of 1914.

DR. CRAWFORD: In summer school?

MR. McAMIS: Yes, and then I came back to the university as a Specialist in Agronomy and did the work that an ordinary specialist did, assisting the county agents in their contacts with farmers, and that, of course, took me all over the state in the various counties, and I don't believe that there's anything that you would be interested in further than, I believe, about 1922.

I was made, in addition to a Specialist in Agronomy, the Agricultural Economist. An economist at that time could be described as a financier without any money. (Laughter) Of course, I had had no training in economics beyond what I picked up in the general agricultural course, but I took that on. I did that for a couple of years myself, and then I was given four young students, who had just graduated from agriculture, to help me. So between us we had about four or five hundred farm business accounts on farmers in Tennessee. That gave me the opportunity of studying and learning the inter-relationships of the various enterprises on an individual

farm, which later I used with the TVA.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you get an opportunity to see farming in about all parts of the state?

MR. McAMIS: Practically every town I was in during that period of time, yes. There was one or two that I think I missed. But I recall one situation. We had a business record of a dairy farm in Central Tennessee. There was also going on the testing of cows; that is, the testing for production and butterfat and so forth, and this particular farmer (won't mention his name) had the high-record herd in the state according to the records of the dairymen testing these cows. Well, he had an office next door to me at the university. And I said, "Hutton," (Hutton was the dairy specialist at that time.) How come if this man is a special dairyman and he has the highest record cows on his farm--high profit cows--and he is going to lose his farm if he doesn't make some changes because I have the record of the whole farm. Well, I said, "Are your records correct on this farm?" I'm just using this as an example. He said, "Yes, I think they are." How can that be when this fellow is losing money on his farm every year I know he is. He can't keep that up if my records are right." Well, I found that they were crediting the cow with milk that they had fed the calves at market price and the calves never paid for it. (Laughter) So there was another indication that you have to deal with a farm as a unit if you are going to judge the efficiency and outcome of farm programs. I hadn't intended to get into that, Charles.

DR. CRAWFORD: I think it is interesting background. I'm

glad we have it.

MR. McAMIS: Now let's go to May of '33. May of '33 was the first contact I had with the TVA. I was going out of the agricultural building coming home one afternoon, and I met Dr. Morgan on the road. He stopped me. He lived on the university farm at that time. And he said, "Mac, have you read the Tennessee Valley Act?" And I said, "Well, Doctor, I have read Section 5 pretty carefully." (5-E is it? Let's get it correct.)

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, sir. 5-E: "Under the authority of this act the Board may make donations of sales."

MR. McAMIS: That's right. But I hadn't read it all, I told him. Well, he said, "It's the phosphate we want, isn't it? I said, "Yes, sir, I think that's the case. I think that's right." That ended that conversation right there.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was that during the school year of '33?

MR. McAMIS: I think that would have been six weeks to two months after the act was passed that I met Dr. Morgan. I hadn't seen him before that.

DR. CRAWFORD: That would have been in the summer, I suppose, of '33.

MR. McAMIS: That's right.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were you on the faculty of the University of Tennessee?

MR. McAMIS: I was in agricultural extension.

DR. CRAWFORD: And where were you headquartered then?

MR. McAMIS: At the university farm.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you spend much of your time traveling then?

MR. McAMIS: Oh, yes. I would say two-thirds of it.

DR. CRAWFORD: How well did you know Dr. H. A. Morgan? What contact did you have with him, sir?

MR. McAMIS: Well, I knew Dr. Morgan very well, and when he would leave home and I was a student at the university, I was delegated to go to his house and protect his family while he was gone, spending the night. And he was Secretary of the East Tennessee Farmers' Convention for many years, and then he was made President (I've forgotten the date of that--about'18, I suppose). You see, he was the Dean of Agriculture and Director of the Experiment Station up until that time. And of course I took some of his classes. He taught some in the Agriculture Department, and an interesting thing right there is I could almost tell by what he said in these classes that he had been to Central Tennessee.

Now, the significance of that is that Central Tennessee, in what is known as the Blue-Grass Area, was an entirely different thing so far as its phosphate content of the soil was concerned. He found an area that was covered pretty well with grass at that time. All these other areas surrounding it, in a sharp contrast in the type of agriculture that was practiced in Middle Tennessee in the Blue-Grass Area, with that immediately

surrounding it on soils poor in minerals.

Well, let me go a little further than that. At about that time there were three-times as many acres of cover crops as cultivated crops in the Central Basin. On the Highland Rim, which is right around it, and a mineral-core area, it was just the reverse: three-times as many acres of cultivated crops as cover crops, including pasture and small grain. And that must have impressed Dr. Morgan, having come from Louisiana in the crop and agriculture, you see?

DR. CRAWFORD: Did he think that was poor use of the land in the Highland Rim?

MR. McAMIS: Well, yes. He thought it ought to be changed, of course. I think we ought to go into that just a little, and you can strike out all this, Charles, when you get to it if you want to.

DR. CRAWFORD: I think we need this background.

MR. McAMIS: But I used to have a few off-days in Nashville when I was going from one county to another, and I spent what time I could in the library over at Nashville to try to get the history of this Central Basin area and see what all this was about--this contrast. You can go into it from any direction. Well, I found the earliest maps of Central Tennessee showed the roads, or trails rather, coming into that area from all directions, just like the spokes of a wheel. And whether those trails were made by game coming in or by Indians going out--maybe both--but anyhow that was the situation when I got the first de-

scription of it. Now DeSoto travelers went through the Southern part of it and their report from that called this area "a savannah". "A savannah," as I understand it, is a grassy plain. That was in the records there. And in T. R. Roosevelt's Winning the West, you can find the statement that the herds of buffaloes in the Central Basin were abundant. I mean there were lots of herds there. There were 100 buffalo in a herd. The game was plentiful and the rivers were named Duck River, Buffalo River.

DR. CRAWFORD: Elk River.

MR. McAMIS: Elk River, and some more of them, you see? And James Robertson made a trip from Nashboro to Boonesboro, and the record says that he went a day's journey through an open park-like area, and then entered a dense forest. The record doesn't say whether he was on horseback or on foot, but he must have been in a hurry because he was going over there to get powder to defend the settlement at Nashboro against Indian attacks. Now this area was called "the dark and bloody ground" in history. You're familiar with Tennessee history?

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, sir. I know it rather well.

MR. McAMIS: Well, you know "the dark and bloody ground" --now whether that was because of the fighting over that area or whether it was because of the hunting in the area, but at any rate, no Indian tribe had ever been permitted to own and occupy that area. The surrounding tribes wouldn't permit it. And they all hunted in that area; that was the common hunting ground of the Choctaws,

the Creeks, the Shawnees, the Chickasaws and the Cherokees, and they hunted in that area. Now, you can imagine the Cherokee Indians going from the Smoky Mountains, let's say or East Tennessee, across the Cumberland Plateau to hunt. Now, why? Because that's where the game was. Now why was it there? That's where the minerals were, and that's why the livestock and the game was concentrated in that area.

Now, I'm going to venture a statement here that I would be hard-put to prove. There was never any game in the Smoky Mountain area except it went in there for refuge. There was no game on the Cumberland Plateau. Why? There were no minerals in the land, and you don't have laurel and rhododendron growing on areas that are rich in minerals of lime and particularly lime and phosphate.

So you had that example. Now, let me go back a little. During the Civil War and immediately afterward the cotton growing moved as far North as Southern Ohio. There was cotton gin at Loudon, Tennessee--in East Tennessee--the reason being, of course, to build up the supply of cotton after the Civil War, and Middle Tennessee had its share of this cotton. Those big houses of that period were not built out of livestock, as we know it today, but they were built primarily out of cotton and corn. Tennessee was the big corn state in the union. In 1850, '60--along there--Tennessee was the leading hog producing state in the union, and a lot of it was going on in this Blue-Grass Area. Now the significance of that is this: That by 1900 cotton had practically disappeared from the Central Basin except around Murfreesboro and it's what is called the dome of Middle Tennes-

see in which the phosphate lands had been washed away. It's poor in minerals too--that little area around that red land. Cotton still stayed there; corn still stayed; but at Mt. Pleasant and Gallatin and all of those other areas, this land had gone back from cultivated crops, back into grass.

Now, young fellow, when you get time to do it, you study the natural history (and you can write it and I can't), but somebody ought to write up the natural history of the various soil areas surrounding that Central Basin area and how it affected the thinking and habits of the people.

DR. CRAWFORD: It's very interesting, but I don't think anyone has ever written that.

MR. McAMIS: That's never been written, and if somebody who could write had time to do it, that would be the most interesting thing.

DR. CRAWFORD: I think it would be because the development of the cotton area was very much different from the cattle-growing and the tobacco region, you know.

MR. McAMIS: Now, Charles, that's the only area in the United States that I know anything about which has gone out of grass and livestock--game, in the first place, cultivation, and gone back into grass--the only one.

DR. CRAWFORD: What is the mineral content of the soil? Is it best for this sort of thing--for livestock?

MR. McAMIS: Oh, yes. Some areas over there had as much phosphate in them--some of those soils--as was in the fertilizer bag before TVA. I mean percentage-wise. So I wish you would write it. I can't do it, but you'd just have to go back and do a lot of research, but all the records are there. They can be had, and it's exceptional. Now of course, you've got Central Kentucky that was practically the same thing, but much smaller area.

DR. CRAWFORD: I think the Lexington Basin or the Blue-Grass Basin is much like Nashville, isn't it?

MR. McAMIS: That's right, but it's much smaller. Am I making this clear to you? I think you need to get that background. Dr. Morgan called me one day after this first meeting about this phosphate thing and he said he was just getting so many letters from his farmer friends for jobs. Of course, that was in '33, right in the bottom of the depression, but he just couldn't do anything else. We couldn't think about what he ought to be thinking about. I knew all these farmers. At that time I was Secretary of the East Tennessee Farmers' Convention. I would come over and write these letters for him and get them off his desk, so I said, "Well, I've arranged with Mr. Myers, who was the head of the Farm Credit Administration, to make a trip across the state and see how the work of the credit administration is functioning, and as quickly as I get that done, I'll come over and answer these letters."

So I did, and when I got it done I said, "Doc, I've never seen this

damn dam of yours at Muscle Shoals. I think I would like to go down there sometime." I had been all around it, but I had just never taken the time to go down and see it. And he said, "Well, I'll call you some day when I'm going down," and he did.

We went down there and were standing on the platform below Wilson Dam, one of these flumes--all the water was flowing over one of those flumes, idle--no generator. He looked up at it and said, "What do you think this thing could do for farmers and farm people?" I said, "I don't know what it could do for farmers. I've never seen this thing before." "Well," he said, "if you and your associates at the university don't know what this could do for farmers, who do you think would?" Then he took me over to the Nitrate Plant #2, and these copper cables as big as my arm were in there, Charles, and those old furnaces which never operated, you know. He said, "What do you think this could do for farmers?" I said, "Doc, I don't have any notion. I never saw anything like this before." "Well if you don't know and your associates up at the university don't know, who do you think would?" That kind of impressed me, and I didn't say much, but I got pictures of all of it and I came back. And soon thereafter he had asked for my release from the university for a year.

So when I came back from that trip to Muscle Shoals, I got in my A-Model car and I went from Chattanooga to Bristol talking to his farmer friends. Most of them that I was talking to had been to the East Tennessee Farmers' Convention and they had been county presidents at that time at the East Tennessee Farmers' Convention, and I knew these people very

well. So I stopped and talked to them and showed them these pictures, and I said, "Dr. Morgan wants to know what we think this could do for farming."

Well, the women had the answer right away. If they could get a light in the house, in the kitchen especially, that was heaven as far as they were concerned, so they could answer you quick. The men didn't know much more than I did, but I got up to a little place between Jefferson City and Dandridge. A fellow ran a light in a mill and he had a little generator in the mill, and he had put a light in his house. I said, "Bob Franklin, what can this thing do for farming?" "Well," he said, "McAmis, we enjoy coming down and listening to you fellows telling us about these little plots on university farm. We think it's fine, but we just don't know whether we can do that on a whole farm or not. We have never done it." And I said, "Bob, I have never seen a farm in Tennessee treated according to the results of these plots on the university farm, and I've been practically all over this state. And you're just dead right about that. You don't know and we don't know what would happen on a whole farm if it were treated like the plots indicate--whether you could afford it or whether you couldn't."

So I went back and I said, "Doc, I've got at least some of the answer to your question: What can this do for farmers? Now these fellows--one of them anyhow--when I talked to them, nearly all of them agree that they would like to have enough fertilizer to put on a farm according to the way the experiment station recommends. Now," I said, "we'd have to have not just one farm, but if we're going to undertake a thing like that we ought to have it on all soil types--general soil types--and we ought to have it

by types of farming. You've got your vegetable farms up around Newport, with the Stokley Canning Company, and you've got your dairy farms, and you've got farms on the shale areas of East Tennessee (I'm using some general soil classifications now) and there ought to be different size farms. What a little farmer can do may not be what a bigger one can do, and by that time it's going to take a lot of fertilizer. If we do that on farms it ought to be just not in one county. We ought to have this in 120 counties (approximately 120 counties in the Valley). It's going to take a lot of fertilizer."

He said, "Well, if you'll get Dr. Curtis to agree to something like this, I'll put it up to the Board." Well, I just didn't have any notion that I could get Dr. Curtis to agree to this, but I went after him. Patsy, his daughter, said one day, "How did you meet Daddy?" Oh, I said, "I met him head on." (Laughter) We fought it out, and we came to understand one another and respect one another, but we didn't agree by any means a lot of the times, one of which I won't point out to you. I mean one point. So the Doc agreed to this and they had one furnace started down at the Shoals which would produce 48 tons of Kepper-super phosphate--about 48 tons a day. Not a year, but a day.

Well, now let me go back a little. When Norris Dam was begun, there were about three thousand farm families that had to move out of their present homes--off their present farms. About a third of those, or more, were in Union County, Tennessee, so they asked me to work out some way of helping these families to move, and, Charles, that was the most puzzling thing

I ever undertook to do. This other thing was simple, but when you begin to think about moving three thousand families out of an area in which they have always lived, just how are you going to do it and what are you going to do to help them?

DR. CRAWFORD: They didn't want to go, did they?

MR. McAMIS: Oh, no. And remember this now: Every house of any kind up there was full of people. These boys--the old ones had never been out much. These young ones had been off working in industry and they had lost their jobs, of course. It was in the middle of the depression. There were no jobs, and they had all come back, so these places up at Norris were just as full of people as they could be. And there was no experience in this country, or any other country that I could find, that would give you any guidepost of helping these people move. However, I knew that in about 1925 or '26 the Smoky Mountain Park people had moved a considerable number of these mountaineers out of there. If you go in there, you can see now where they were. I knew these people too, I had been up there; I used to go up there fishing and spend the night with them. I didn't know what had become of them. They had all moved away and I needed to know what had happened to them, you see, to see what was ahead of these people in Norris area.

So along in 1934 I got a call one day from John Neely. He was in the Arnstein Building and I was over in the Sprankle Building. He said, "Could you come over here?" And I said, "Yes, I guess I can."

I said to John Neely, "I don't think I can spend much, John, because

I haven't got much." "Well, if you had it, how much could you spend?" I said, "Oh, I don't know. I don't know what I would spend it for. I'd want to get my money's worth if I spent it." Well, he said, "I want you to take some money and get rid of it." You see, they were trying to get money back into circulation at that time in Washington, and TVA had taken an allotment. "Well," I said, "now, John, I'll have to go home and think about this a little bit."

And then I thought about this possibility of finding out what had happened to these people in the Smoky Mountains, and I went back and told him I thought I might spend $10,000. "Why," he said, "you've got to spend $100,000." (Laughter) I said, "Well, I don't know whether I can do that or not, but I'll see what I can do."

And I went out to the university and found out these boys that were good students and their mothers were widows, some of them, and some of them needed money. So I made arrangements with the university to put these boys on to go up to Smoky Mountain Park and find out where these people had lived, get a description of the farm they had or what their conditions were--and I worked out a schedule to get it by--then follow them and see where they went and see what the conditions are there.

Well, that was put under Mr. Whittle out there, and he worked it out. It's a pretty sad story. These people had not gotten along well at all. The reason was this: In the rural areas, especially on small farms, they didn't farm for money; they just farmed to make a living--to live on what they made. And when they moved from up there, you see, one of them would

have a fresh cow now and another one would have a fresh cow next year, and they exchanged milk. They were all in small areas and they lived close together. One had an orchard and the other had a blackberry patch, and all that was broken up, you see, when they moved out. And it was kind of an unwritten law that you weren't to sell your neighbors anything. Now, my grandmother wouldn't have sold one of her neighbors anything. She'd give it to them if she had it, but they didn't sell it. It was a different thing from what it is now.

Of course, by that time I had gotten the idea that we might change the use of these hillsides from corn to grass, and I wanted a record of what the situation was at the time we began. So I worked this out through the university and gave some students a compass, and laid off a cross-section of this valley, and a soil auger, as I remember it. I've forgotten now. But anyhow they were to put the length of the trip across these areas, and they were to put down what kind of crops were on that line--just a line across--and several cross-sections. Well, I finally got up to my $100,000 that was spent in that way. I'm not sure it was profitable because we got a soil survey later, which gave us a good deal of this information, you see. And then when the test demonstration farms came in, we had an accurate record of what the land use was on these farms so that it was never gone back and re-checked--those cross-sections, that I know of.

Now, back to this question of relocation of these farm people. Union County did not have a county agent--hadn't had one in a long while, and I felt that's what they needed--a good county agent up there to help them work out this problem of relocation. I told the district agent (He's the

one that had charge of the employment of the county agents in eastern Tennessee, and the area covering Norris Peninsula--Norris area) that he ought to get a county agent up there and told him why--that they could do more for these people than anybody else. They had the information, and that's what the people needed. I said, "You see if you can't get this county agent up there."

Dean Hoskins, who was Acting President in Dr. Morgan's absence, got wind of this business that we were going to try to get the county agents to help in relocation of these people. He didn't like that much; he didn't think it was the university's job. Well I said, "Dean, the university has got this information. Nobody else has it that can guide these people with respect to farms and values and areas that they will probably move into, and if the university doesn't do it, who do you think is going to do it?" "Well," he said, "the Board of Trustees is meeting in a few days. If you'll meet the Board of Trustees and convince them, why it will be all right with me." I met with them, and they were skeptical, of course. And some of them, for one reason or another, were opposed to TVA in the beginning anyhow. But they finally agreed. I said, "I'll report to you, and if it gets the university into any trouble, I'll be the first one to tell you, and we'll go from there, and if we have to change it, we will."

So Mr. Elrod, the district agent, called me one day and he said, "I've done what you said. I've gone up there and gotten an appropriation of $1,000 from the county for a county agent. Now the university and the Department of Agriculture can put in another $1,000." And I said, "Benton,

that is the hardest job of any counties in the state of Tennessee. Now you want to get the best one you've got, and you can't employ the best county agent for $2,000." "Well, if you can get any money anywhere else, why we'll put it in." But he said, "I'm meeting this committee this afternoon at 1:00 and if you can get any money you better tell me now." I said, "Well, I can't tell you this minute, but I'll tell you as quick as I can." I wrote a little memorandum about a half a page to (what we had then was a coordinator instead of a Manager) John Blanford, and put it on his desk and told his secretary, "Now you be sure he reads this thing quickly. Don't let it lay on his desk." So in about fifteen or twenty minutes he called me up there. He said, "What is a county agent?" (Laughter)

DR. CRAWFORD: He came from Cincinnati, didn't he?

MR. McAMIS: I've forgotten where John came from. Well, I explained it to him and he said, "Well, the Board is meeting at 10:00 and I'll put this letter before the Board. If you want to meet with them, you can." I said, "That's just what I want--exactly." So I read this note that I had sent up and I told them I wanted $1,000. I watched Dave Lilienthal. He looked at H. A.. Of course, H. A. Morgan knew what I was about, you see, and I saw Dave nod his head to Doc, and they voted yes. Of course, A. E. voted against it. They recognized the trouble right then, and I said, "Now, I'll report to you what goes on, and if you are not satisfied. . ." (I said this before they voted).

MR. McAMIS: Now that was the first money that TVA transferred to the university for a county agent in Union County. Well, I went up there. I really recommended the county agent to put in there to Elrod, and he employed him. And I went up there several trips, and I had gone over to the university and gotten a picture of the relief model at the Geology Department, with the different soil areas. They were very general, but I had that all marked off on the mountains, and I got that enlarged. And I took it up there and I went out to meetings with the county agent and, of course, those people at that time associated me with the university, and I didn't tell them any different right then. I didn't think they needed to know. Of course, they were not very friendly to TVA. So they could see where the valleys were, and as I say, now those older people had not traveled out of that area. If I get myself into this too much, Charles, I wish you would tell me. I don't want to talk about myself. I'm talking about a program.

But we would go up there and ask the people to get together by communities in that particular area, and the county agent would have a cloth blackboard and he would ask them what kind of a program they were interested in, and they would discuss the farm program with him that they would like to undertake. And pretty soon I would notice somebody in there with a serious look on his face, and he'd say, "Why, Mr. Warden, (the county agent) they tell us that we've got to move and can't do that kind of a program. We wouldn't get that done in time and it wouldn't do us any good." So he would say, "Now what's the problem in moving," and turned the black-

board over. If ever I've seen serious people, that's when they began to think of how they were going to get out of there and where they were going, and what they were going to do.

Let me see if I can state this properly. You may know this. On small farms the women really do the management pretty much. They handle the finances. Well, there isn't much finances to handle, but they are the ones that make the program, so I said, "Well, now if that's the case, we ought to have the best woman assistant to these county agents that we can get to go up there and help these women make the decision that they've got to make about getting out of here." So we got Miss Annie Whittle, Mrs. Eblin really she was.

DR. CRAWFORD: What was her last name?

MR. McAMIS: She was a Whittle--Miss Annie Whittle. That's the way everybody knows her, but she married late in life to Dr. Eblin, but he was dead by that time. I believe she was the county agent up in Sevier County at that time. But that woman did more than all the men that we had working this thing to help those people get relocated and get satisfied, and so forth. I asked Mr. Elrod to send a questionnaire to all the farmers that the county agents could find that had farms for sale throughout this whole area around here. Well, we got back several hundred of those that had farms for sale and there was a description of the farm and its location and the price that they would take for the farm. Well, I could see that they were all inflated.

Mr. John Anderson had been an appraiser for the Federal Land Bank, and

he lived out at Greenback. I got my wife in the car and went down there one Sunday afternoon, and I said, "Mr. John, you know the values of these farms better than anybody else that I know anything about. Now, if you want to render a service to your hillbillies in East Tennessee, here is your opportunity. If you will go and appraise these farms and put a proper appraisal on them, why that'll be a lot of help in keeping down the inflated values and in giving these people some idea of the value. Would you do it?" "Well," he said, "you'd have to get the permission of the Federal Land Bank at Louisville."

Well, I wrote the Federal Land Bank and they referred me to Washington, and I wrote to Washington to the Farm Credit Administration. You see, I had done a little work for the Credit Administration when I was at the university. I told you about that. And they referred it back to Louisville, and they passed it back again. I just got on the train and went to Washington and I went to Bill Myers, who was administrator of the Farm Credit Administration. I said, "Bill, I've got to have Mr. Anderson and he's the man who can do more for this proposition than anybody I know." Well he agreed to it, so Elrod took Mr. Anderson up there and he took some other appraisers and met these. By that time they had formed a kind of a community organization of these people to move out of there, so he met them and had a committee.

And, of course, they chose Mr. Anderson to appraise this land for them. Well, he would go out to these people who had farms for sale and we would take this list that we had, that I had gotten through the county agents, and sit down on the porch and tell these fellows that he saw that they had

listed their farm for sale and that he had been asked to put a value on it. And if they wanted him to appraise it, he could and if they didn't, he said it was all right, but he said, "Of course, we're going to put this before the people over at Norris when they want to buy farms. And we're going to have a special list here of those that meet the standard of appraised value and we are going to take the rest of the list along with it, but they will probably be interested in these farms that are certified as to value."

Well, that put the seller up pretty tight, you see. He wanted on that special lise. So we got several hundred of those that he had certified as to their value and then they employed some more people to take these people to these areas. They selected the areas that they wanted to go into and a committee would go to these farms and look them over and come back and report to these people in the Norris area. I think that was the toughest job I've ever undertaken, to get organized, but I think it did some good. The fact is, I think it did a lot of good to keep inflated values down. You remember, if you look these facts up, according to the 1930 census, the price of farms in that area--the values of land, according to the census, had not declined from 1920 to 1930. Our land had gone down to 50% in that period. Now, why? Because these farms were worth more to them when they didn't have a job than they were when they had a job.

So I told the appraisers, "Now, you don't appraise this land on its productivity necessarily. You appraise it as a home and a place of refuge for these farm people. And by golly, be sure we're paying these people enough to restate and redevelop the values on this property." That pattern

was followed pretty much all the way down the Tennessee Valley area. Over in North Carolina though, they put one of their best home agents on, and these women really did that job. It wasn't the men, I don't think; it was the women in those small areas. Now, if you take larger farms, why the women are just looking after the home, but in these small ones, the women have a lot to do with the planning of the farm and the whole business.

I've got a picture down in the basement somewhere in my file from Dr. Curtis when he was engineer down at Muscle Shoals, and the fertilizer from that one furnace was piled right up to the ceiling. (Laughter) He said, "Now, damn you, get this out of here. We've got to have room to put some fertilizer." I'd been still all busy with this thing up here and they had told me, Charles, that this thing at Muscle Shoals was experimental. Well, an experimental thing is something that you don't know the outcome of. I assume it wouldn't be experimental if you did. Therefore, I didn't think they knew whether they were going to have fertilizer or not. Consequently, I couldn't go out and promise these demonstration farmers fertilizer unless I had it. So he didn't have much storage and this furnace was putting out those 48 tons a day, (I think that's the figure. I might be a little bit wrong, but not much.). So this fertilizer was piled up to the ceiling and no organization to take care of it.

THIS IS THE ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE OF MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY. THIS PROJECT IS "AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY." THE PLACE IS KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE. THE DATE IS MARCH 11, 1970, AND THIS IS INTERVIEW NUMBER TWO WITH MR. JOHN C. McAMIS, FORMERLY WITH THE TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY. THE INTERVIEW IS BY DR. CHARLES W. CRAWFORD, DIRECTOR OF THE MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE, AND WAS TRANSCRIBED BY MRS. BRENDA P. MEIER.

MR. McAMIS: The early decision to produce and improve phosphate fertilizers was based on the following considerations: first, that the farmers of the Central Basin had been able, voluntarily, to adjust the use of their land from row crops to cover crops over an extended period of time. Second, with the exception of the so-called Blue-Grass area of the Central Basin, the soils of the Tennessee Valley area were too poor in minerals, including phosphate, lime and potash, to produce crops of the desirable nutritional quality both from the standpoint of human use and livestock rations. Minerals would correct this deficiency.

DR. CRAWFORD: Large-scale use of minerals would correct the deficiency?

MR. McAMIS: That's right. Now, third, that the shift from row crops was a necessary step in the preservation of soil erosion and in the conservation of water resources--that these desirable objectives be reached to a worthwhile extent. The

out-put of the experimental manufacturing plants at Muscle Shoals was of sufficient scale to permit such large-scale use. Fortunately, the necessity of large-scale production in order to prove the efficiency of the manufacturing method fit into the need for large-scale use for the adjustment of crops and land use. That ought to be clear.

DR. CRAWFORD: McAmis, let me ask you a few general questions about various topics now. For one thing, in what area or areas were most of the families who were relocated settled? Did they remain close to home? Did they scatter? Did they settle in certain types of places?

MR. McAMIS: I don't think that I can answer that question in terms of number, but as a general rule they settled within the upper East Tennessee counties.

DR. CRAWFORD: What did they do after they moved? Did they generally follow the same type of activity--farming, or whatever they had done before?

MR. McAMIS: Many of these people were selected by their neighbors to become test demonstration farmers, and therefore, had intensive advice and help from the county agricultural agent.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did this usually help them to become more successful farmers?

MR. McAMIS: Well, the short answer is yes, although there are exceptions due to unusual cir-

stances.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was there much resistance to moving on the part of any families?

MR. McAMIS: The short answer to that is also yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: How did they resist? Did they refuse to leave? Was there violence?

MR. McAMIS: There were few cases of absolute refusal to leave their homes, and I can't remember how they really got some of those people out.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was the schedule of moving people out held up any by their refusal to go?

MR. McAMIS: Yes, it was delayed by their reluctance to go. In fact, it was nip and tuck as to whether they were going to get out of there or not. This was particularly true in the Norris area as compared with other areas where the same problem existed.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you believe that in general these families were as happy a year later in their new location as they had been in their old?

MR. McAMIS: Happiness is a hard thing to measure, but from all the reports that I know, as a general rule, they were very satisfied--at least after a period of time. They had to make the adjustment. Now there's a point that hasn't been brought up in connection with this relocation. There were organized com-

mittees of people in the Norris area to visit prospective communities. At the same time, there were committees organized in the communities to welcome and guide and help these people that moved from the Norris area.

This plan was the work of the people, both in the Norris area and in the communities to which they were attracted.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did most of the people who had their land taken for TVA feel they received a fair price for it?

MR. McAMIS: The answer to that is hard to measure, but it's my impression that, at the time, they did not. When they moved into other communities and re-established themselves on farms, I think they were satisfied in most cases. Now, does that answer your question?

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, sir. That's very clear. Mr. McAmis, can you sort of outline the positions you held in your work with TVA from 1933 until you retirement?

MR. McAMIS: There was only one, and that was Director of the Department of Agricultural Relations.

DR. CRAWFORD: But your duties changed considerably over a period of time, didn't they?

MR. McAMIS: Oh, yes, they did.

DR. CRAWFORD: Can you summarize the changes in your work and responsibilities?

MR. McAMIS: Well, the principal change came when the

TVA began distribution of some of its fertilizers through farm cooperatives, not only in the Tennessee Valley, but in the parts of the Tennessee Valley states outside of the Valley and in many states of the Mid-West and Eastern Seaboard.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were you generally able to work successfully with farmers' organizations? I know you've had a good deal of background in this.

MR. McAMIS: It was hoped that the farm cooperatives would agree to utilize the TVA fertilizers in an educational way. This, they were either unwilling or unable to do to the extent that was desirable.

DR. CRAWFORD: What effect did World War II have on your work? What changes did it bring?

MR. McAMIS: The main one was the use of some of the facilities of Nitrate Plant #2 for the production of nitrogen for military use.

DR. CRAWFORD: In what year did you retire from TVA?

MR. McAMIS: I can't remember. I was trying to think of that the other day. I believe it's been ten years. You can get that record from TVA, but I can't remember.

DR. CRAWFORD: That would be about 1960 then?

MR. McAMIS: I can't remember, Charlie. I've lost count of it. I can look it up and let you know if you need to know that.

DR. CRAWFORD: Some of the TVA people you have worked with are no longer living. I'd like to get a few comments, if I could, about what you believed the main contribution to be to TVA of Harcourt Morgan and Gordon Clapp. What was their most valuable contribution to TVA, for each one?

MR. McAMIS: That's a very difficult question for me to answer. To make any judgement with respect to it, you would almost have to assume what would have happened if they had not been there. I don't know how to express it. It's just beyond calculation. Each of them contributed a great deal, which is an understatement, but in a very different way.

I think Dr. Morgan's most outstanding contribution was the development of plans and programs which made the people in the Tennessee Valley co-partners with the TVA, if that means anything to you.

DR. CRAWFORD: I think it does. There was a great deal of support in the Valley for TVA.

MR. McAMIS: Yes, and H. A. Morgan was probably more responsible for that than any other one person.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you believe it was wise, then, to have one director appointed from the region?

MR. McAMIS: Well, I don't think there is any doubt about that although it depends a good deal on the individual who is appointed. It is certainly possible to have efficient and able directors entirely from outside of the area.

DR. CRAWFORD: But in Harcourt Morgan's case, it did help, didn't it, in relating TVA's problems?

MR. McAMIS: Particularly in the beginning. Now to Gordon Clapp. With respect to Gordon Clapp, he was able to absorb and retain a vast quantity of factual information, with each fact properly related to the other. He was able to do this beyond any person that has been of my acquaintance.

DR. CRAWFORD: Mr. McAmis, before we stop, I would like to get on the record what part of your work you considered the most valuable contribution to the development of TVA.

MR. McAMIS: I don't know how to answer that question.

DR. CRAWFORD: Which did you enjoy most, personally?

MR. McAMIS: Well, I enjoyed all of it. The fact is that I've never done anything that I didn't enjoy. If I couldn't enjoy it, I quit. Most of the things that were accomplished by the Department of Agricultural Relations were not the results of an individual effort, but of a group effort. The plan to assist people who had to move from reservoir areas is an example, and probably the most outstanding example of the group effort was the cooperation of the agricultural colleges in the small-scale testing of fertilizers and in the large-scale use in the test demonstration program.

DR. CRAWFORD: Thank you, Mr. McAmis.

MR. McAMIS: Put that question in there and I'll give you an answer.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were you satisfied with what they did, sir?

MR. McAMIS: The agricultural colleges were, at that time and, as far as I know, to some extent, still are, organized on a subject matter basis; that is, agronomy, livestock, economics and so forth. And at no place except in the county agent's relation to farmers was scientific agriculture brought to the farmer as in relation to a rural farm or unit farm program. I guess that's clear. The colleges just couldn't get together, you see. When it came to putting all of their effort in one little place, there was too much specialization.

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